

Petruzzelli, empowerment of women professionals

The President of the Northeast District of Fidapa BPW Italy, Chair in the Mentoring Task Force in BPW International, Member of the CAC Constitution Advisory Committee of BPW International tells us about the associationism of yesterday and today: from the first "Forum for Women" to the coordination of the partnership between BPW International in IEG, the dialogue with an international reference point for the development and affirmation of female economic talents in the world.

Di Luca Paganini 8 March 2023

<https://www.iegexpomagazine.com/carla-laura-petruzzelli-lempowerment-delle-professioniste-nel-business-globale/#>



It is concreteness, combined with respect for history, tradition, and associational and statutory objectives, that is the high road of the actions of Carla Laura Petruzzelli, Northeast district president of Fidapa BPW Italy. The association, which has more than 10,000 members divided among 300 sections distributed throughout Italy, is the national declination of BPW International, the global network founded in 1930 that unites more than 25,000 professional women from more than 100 countries and 5 continents, in which Carla Laura Petruzzelli is currently the European representative in the mentoring task force and a member of the Constitutional Advisory Committee.

Roles and experiences that in 2020 allowed her to play a leading role in the mediation and coordination of the partnership between BPW International and Italian Exhibition Group, created with the shared goal of amplifying female talent in business, science, and culture. An agreement that has resulted, among other things, in the organization of association events during the exhibition group's international events, with Vicenzaoro as the leader and forerunner of the collaboration.

Dr. Petruzzelli, a two-year period is drawing to a close for Fidapa BPW Italy, whose association theme was "United toward a common goal: supporting quality education and training and promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship." What value did the concurrent partnership with IEG and collaboration with Vicenzaoro have in achieving these goals?

"It is an agreement that has certified the credibility of projects and facilitated the construction of future projects. Every point of arrival, like this partnership, is a starting point for us, because every hypothesis must then find a practical and concrete application. The global dimension of Vicenzaoro, an event that has always been a leading international stage for the sector, has grown exponentially in recent years. For us, therefore, the event represents an interlocutor of great importance, allowing us to amplify the associative objective of Fidapa BPW Italy to external parties, to involve institutions and sector professionals in the evaluation and promotion of new regulatory and entrepreneurial projects."

So is this a collaboration that fulfills BPW International's need to emphasize global cooperation to achieve the current goals of equality, equal opportunity and valuing differences?

"Yes, it is historically. Just think of what happened in 2009, at the time of my first term as president of the Vicenza section of Fidapa BPW Italy. We were invited to a conference on goldsmith entrepreneurship at an edition of Vicenzaoro as a result of the twinning "On the Road to Gold" that I activated with the Arezzo Fidapa section, later extended internationally with the Basel district. There we discovered that the Basel II agreements presented unfavorable conditions for women entrepreneurs. Then, at the BPW International presidents' congress in Brussels, we presented what was discovered in Vicenza to the attention of the European Commission."

Two terms more than a decade apart and, in fact, a step change in collaboration. What were the factors that enabled this potential achievement?

"Certainly, the realization that times had changed and that the association's management methodology needed to take on a different identity. A development that grew out of a simple business cocktail, a formidable networking tool that I adopted in my new term because of its ability to easily stimulate connections between members and external stakeholders. From a simple, but effective, convivial meeting held at Vicenzaoro in January 2020 came the basis for bringing into the event the contribution of BPW International and Amany Asfour, at that time president of BPW International, now chair of the Africa Business Council and therefore a key interlocutor for industry players to learn about the potential and opportunities for business, development and training for the entire international precious industry on the continent."

Changing opportunities and the leadership model of an association that, rather than social struggle, focuses on the recognition of gender rights. What are the current levers to be leveraged to overcome stereotypes, inequalities and obstacles in the emergence of opportunities in business professions, both locally and internationally?

"Thinking only about rights and not about duties deconcentrates the focus of objectives. That is why today the leadership of the association must be maintained with extreme technical competence. Given the complexity of today's issues and scenarios, organizational and strategic management must equip itself with a business approach. The Northeast district has 905 members for 25 sections, while nationally it has 10,500 and we are the most represented country within BPW International. There are a wide variety of professionals within: there are researchers, teachers, managers, legal professionals. There is no need to draw from the outside. The resources are already on board, and the associative nature lies precisely in the ability to bring out the talents of each category and enhance them in order to achieve collective goals."

What does it mean today to represent Fidapa's Northeast district, an industrious territory with a vocation for growth and entrepreneurship?

"It means being a spokesperson for practical and concrete women, a guarantor of law, innovation and modernity in the global universe of one of the reference territories for entrepreneurship, including women. The responsibility is to meet the economic and social needs of the territory based on the models of the international network, pursuing the development of professional potential, leadership and gender business through networking programs and projects, training and empowerment of skills for female professionals on every level."

BPW International was born under the motto that reads, "When women are united, they can reach for the stars." If Italy has the highest number of members in BPW International's worldwide membership, how close to the stars are our female professionals?

"Having the most significant number of members in BPW International is a symptom of great affection and attachment to an association that has more than 90 years of history and its values, which promotes a spirit of union that facilitates overcoming differences of opinion. In addition, it is a symptom of ability and skill. For us, it is a source of pride to see some of us having achieved important positions within BPW International. Just to mention current events, Giuseppina Seidita serves as Vice President International Membership and Chair Standing Committee Membership, while Eufemia Ippolito is Executive Financial Officer. I myself, with my out-of-country representative roles, engage with great responsibility in international assurance assignments to counter violations of statutes and programs."

It is a multi-year job that has required her determination, perseverance, and extreme willingness to step outside the boundaries of her professional circles to explore something new every day. Where did this desire to make herself such an active participant come from?

"For me, it started as a design challenge to broaden my mindset. In 2006, after creating the "Forum for Women" with Confartigianato, I asked Fidapa for sponsorship. So, I joined the association and shortly thereafter became president. In Fidapa I was immediately defined as an open-minded traditionalist, a definition in which I recognize myself. I immediately received important recognitions, such as that of the "5 Wise Women" at the BPW International Congress in Helsinki in 2011 with the motivation "Dream believer, mountain mover." A path that has enriched me professionally and personally, a great gymnasium of life, devoid of competition but full of competitiveness, giving you the opportunity to understand who you are, to work on your limits, to nurture skills and contacts. Why miss such opportunities? As they say, "life is a banquet and only idiots go hungry," and thanks to FIDAPA you learn a lot and put what you know to good use."

She is Chair in BPW International's mentoring task force, the mechanism through which the association links past, present and future precisely through the sharing of expertise. How can natural bottlenecks in the transfer of responsibilities be avoided?

"To disregard a commitment that is in the bylaws is to betray the statutory principles underlying an association that assumes an attachment to purpose and commitment, not to office. For us to set an example for even a single member is a great achievement. None of us is alone in the journey. When I became district president, I imposed the motto "Distinguish not to extinguish," because we work on remarkable projects, and a leader must know how to equip others so that they can stand out and manifest their professionalism, characteristics and skills, because otherwise there will never be a turnover."